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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Ongoing attacks and retaliations by Muslims and Christians in Nigeria's violent, religiously and ethnically mixed Middle Belt has left more than 100 dead and dozens of properties destroyed since March of this year. This recent Muslim-Christian violence in Plateau State exposes the Nigerian government's failure to effectively deal with a history of religiously-related violence that threatens the country's stability.

"Religiously-related violence has led to more deaths in northern Nigeria than have Boko Haram attacks. The Nigerian government needs to end this entrenched violence and the culture of impunity," said U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Chair Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett.

USCIRF has recommended since 2009 that Nigeria be named a "country of particular concern" (CPC) due to the government's failure to hold accountable perpetrators of religiously-related violence. While since 1999 more than 14,000 persons, both Muslims and Christians, have been killed, USCIRF has been able to document that only 1% of the perpetrators have been prosecuted.

"The Nigerian government's failure to prosecute perpetrators of religiously-related violence only encourages reprisals and intensifies local tensions and mistrust. Boko Haram uses this impunity as a recruitment tool and to justify its attacks on Christians," said Lantos Swett.

The most recent round of fighting started on March 20-21 when armed men, alleged to be from the Fulani tribe, opened fire on the Christian village of Ratas while villagers slept, killing 19. This violence since has led to Christian and Muslim reprisal attacks throughout Plateau State and even Kaduna State, including an Easter weekend assault that left an estimated 80 dead.

In 2012, Boko Haram, an extremist and violent Muslim group, attacked more than 25 churches, primarily those in cities with a history of religious-related violence, to incite Christian reprisals and destabilize Nigeria. Additionally, Boko Haram, which has killed more Muslims than Christians over the past few years, has used Christian attacks on Muslims to justify its attacks on Christians.

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